

SEP 1 1965

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'A Political Fight...

With Violent Military Overtones'

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SAIGON.

The first time Sam Wilson came to Asia, he walked into the jungles of Burma with a carbine in his hands. He was a captain of the lead detachment of a group which the records say was the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional). The newspaper and movie people called it Merrill's Marauders. The enemy in Asia then was the Japanese, and Sam Wilson spent three years fighting them behind their lines.

Sam Wilson is back in Asia again, this time as a colonel. He is back in a gabardine suit with a red tie and he stands at the candle-lit bar of his huge apartment, a half gallon of Chivas Regal in front of him, a houseboy padding in with a bucket of ice, and Nat Cole's voice coming over the stereo set. There are no guns lying around the place. There is very little talk of them, either.

At 41, and after 24 years in the Army, Sam Wilson says that killing people doesn't accomplish a damn thing.

"The Big Red One," he was saying, talking about the

U. S. 1st Infantry Division here in South Viet Nam. "Let's roll them in here, they say. Roll in the Big Red One. They can't stop the Big Red Ones. We'll flatten these bastards and then go home.

"Oh, Christ, what a waste of time. You roll in the Big Red One here, and do you know what you're doing? Just taking the tarpaulin off the field so you can start to play a ball game. This is a political fight we're in here. It has violent military overtones. But it's going to be won or lost politically. Not with any big firefights."

Wilson tipped the Scotch bottle and poured another round. The room next to the bar had tile walks going around

a garden that was lit with Japanese lamps. The center of the ceiling was made of a wire screen. Rain made a waterfall sound as it came through the screen and into a pool in the middle of the garden. Sam Wilson wants to live good. He is going to be here a long time. He is in the Special Forces, but he is attached to the United States Operations Mission. He is in charge of political action in the thatched-roof hamlets and villages which make up this country. Canned milk for babies is Sam Wilson's top weapon.

He is six-foot-two, 195 pounds, with blue eyes and light wavy hair and outdoors on his face and big hands. He is practically inaccessible around Saigon because he works an 18-hour day between his office and the hamlets out around the country where he has men stationed.

He is in the school of Edward Lansdale, the retired major general who has come here to direct counterinsurgency operations. And those who know something of Viet

Nam tell you to see Sam Wilson if you want to find something hopeful.

"Once the Viet Cong get into a hamlet and establish this VC infrastructure, as the book calls it, once they digest the hamlet, you can roll in the Marines and bring all the firepower in the world with you," he was saying. "And for that month that you're there, you own the hamlet. But when the tail end of that column leaves the hamlet, the VC owns it again. And don't you try and go back and spend the night there. So how can you win here with a gun?

"I'm proud I'm a soldier. Hell, I should be out fighting to be a brigade commander in the 101st Airborne. Only we're doing it differently now. We're developing a new kind of soldier. A politico-military breed. Take me. I spent most of the last five years in Russia and the satellite countries. I'm 95 per cent fluent in English and 100 per cent fluent in Russian. And the job here is to fight them for the people. Get the people. They do it with a tight, cohesive organization. They make every man a chairman of something in the hamlet. They give the man dignity. Even if he's the chairman of the firewood organizing committee, he gets a chance to conduct a meeting once a month and be on top.

ONLY A WORD

"The other government, the one that runs Viet Nam, that stops at the district level. Saigon? That's a word to most of these farmers. Some place distant. Once in his life the farmer might meet his district chief. The farmer lives and works in hamlets and villages. That's where there is no government influence. Our job is to bridge the gap and put something in there. We don't do that, then we win nothing around here. Shoot 'em up. Christ, shoot hell out of them. But you win around here by doing things that aren't exciting."

Wilson's job sounds like another of these advance social worker affairs which, after a few successes with much fanfare, amount to a few drops of rain onto the sand. But it is the only way out in this intricate country. Every aluminum casket shoved onto a freight plane at Ton San Nhut for delivery to a house in America is a life lost for nothing unless these social and political things take hold.

"I'd like to go and get a look at those caves they were hiding in," the Marine colonel at Chu Lai was told recently.

"Oh, you can't see them now," he said.

"Why?"

"Because our people are out of the area now and the